TRANSCRIPT—LUCY S. HERRING

Narrator: Lucy S. Herring

Interviewer: Mary Hyde

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Abstract: Mrs. Lucy S. Herring, an eminent Black educator in the Asheville area, was interviewed by Mrs. Hyde about her background and experiences as an educator during racial segregation and integration. Mrs. Herring discusses her upbringing in Union, South Carolina, her education at State College, and her early teaching experiences at Lower Swannanoa and Hill Street School. She also talks about her pursuit of higher education at the University of Chicago and her challenges in obtaining scholarships and grants. Mrs. Herring later became the principal of Mountain Street School and discusses the improvements she made to the school with the help of parents and students.

Note: Mary Hyde donated this interview to Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC, in June 2010 as part of the Biltmore Village Historic Museum Collection (MS210).

MH: —Mrs. Lucy Herring, who is an eminent Black educator in the Asheville area.

[Recording stops; resumes.]

—to do an interview with Bill Allen and Harold Redmond regarding photographs that have belonged to the Redmond family, and articles on Biltmore.

[Recording stops; resumes. The fragment referring to the Redmonds above is likely an artifact of a previous recording which this interview was taped over.]

Mrs. Herring, tell me now, where were you born? You weren't a native Ashevillean.

LH: No, Mrs. Hyde. I am not a native Ashevillean. I was born in Union, South Carolina.

MH: How many were in your family?

LH: There were nine children, six boys and six girls.

MH: I recall from your book, was it your grandmother who was a slave, your grandfather, or was it farther back than that?

LH: It was my grandmother, Lucy Chapman.

MH: And tell me now, what was your basic schooling in Union and what schooling did you have to go on to become a teacher?

LH: I finished the elementary schools in Union. They had grades one through nine. The ninth grade was considered then high school, and so if you finished the ninth

grade, you finished high school then, and those who finished from the better high schools went to college and they were classified as freshmen. They had to do four years of college. But my principal encouraged me to take the entrance examination at the college, which I attended, which was State College [now South Carolina State University (SCSU)] at Orangeburg, South Carolina. If you didn't take the examination, you would just automatically become a freshman student. Ordinarily you finished in four years, but if you took the examination and made a good grade, you could finish in three years. And so I went to State and because my principal encouraged me to take the entrance examination, I did, and I was able to finish State College in three years.

MH: How large a school was State College when you were a student there?

LH: It was quite a large college. I don't know about the accreditation of colleges. I don't know how it might've been. It was considered generally as one of the better state colleges. It was a state college.

MH: Were there like 100 in your class or 200, or 400? Just-

LH: Yes, I'm trying to think. I know we had over 100. Benjamin Mays was one of my classmates. I remember him very vividly. We had over 100 in our class.

MH: So after three years at State College, then what did you do?

LH: On commencement day, I was called to the president's office to interview him and his wife and when I went, they informed me that they had decided to accept me as

principal of one of the county schools that was partly supported by the college. They had home economics and the regular grades, and the college paid one of the teacher's salary. It was a two-teacher school, and the county paid the other teacher's salary.

MH: I bet some of the boys were bigger than you were.

LH: Bigger and older.

MH: How old were you then?

LH: I was 16, and there were several big boys who were 17, 18, 19, but they were no problem. I had a difficult time with one of the school committeemen who felt that I wouldn't last a month out there as principal of the school, but I had no trouble with the big boys. They were my friends.

MH: How long did you stay at this school then?

LH: The name of the school was Great Branch and I stayed there four years. I was given this job, offered this job with understanding that I would have to attend one summer school session. And that summer I was 16, Professor Michael in Asheville was conducting an experimental summer school and I was one of the members. I attended that summer school and Mr. Michael was the only instructor. It was a rather dry program, and I went out into the community and got children and brought them in and got permission from Professor Michael to do some demonstration teaching. Unit teaching was not very well practiced. Most of the

teachers didn't know very much about that that time, and I had had some special training in that. And because of this extra work in enriching the program with demonstration teaching and things of that type, Mr. Michael offered me a job in the county. He was supervisor of the county and principal of the Hill Street Elementary School, and also director of the summer school.

When he called me in to say to me that he wanted me to work in the county, I told him that I already had a position. Dr. And Ms. Wilkinson at Orangeburg had offered me the principalship of a two-teacher school in Orangeburg County. And when he asked the months of the school to do in session, I said, "Well, from November until May." He said, "Well, that's no problem then. Our schools in Buncombe County start in August and we run only three months, and so that would fit in beautifully. That means that you're going to do 10 months." Of course, I was delighted and I accepted the school at Lower Swannanoa. I had 17 of the children, delightful experience.

MH: Where was the school exactly in Swannanoa?

LH: It was below the little town of Swannanoa. There were two Black schools in Swannanoa. One was Upper Swannanoa and the other was Lower Swannanoa, and I think Lower Swannanoa must have been about two or three miles below the little town. In fact, you had to go that distance and coming from Asheville to the town of Swannanoa, you would pass through Lower Swannanoa. And I would teach in Swannanoa August, September, and October, then I'd get the Carolina

Special on Friday afternoon after the closing of school and go to Orangeburg, where I would begin the Great Branch school, and I taught there November, December, January, February, March, April, May. The children were late entering school because it was a farming area and they were sharecroppers, and of course they were not allowed to enter school until the cotton season picking was over. They had this saying that the children would enter just before Christmas and drop out just before Easter. They had to drop out of school early in the spring to plant the crops, especially the cotton crops.

MH: Why did Buncombe County only have a three-month school? Was that just for Blacks or did all children at that time only go to school three months in Buncombe County?

LH: The Black schools had the three months. I don't know whether all of the white schools had more than three months. There were some, the big schools I know, the big white schools had more than three months. They claimed that the weather was so severe that they'd get in the three months before the severe weather.

MH: Now, what year was that then that you'd started at Lower Swannanoa?

LH: I started Lower Swannanoa in August of 1916.

MH: 1916. So then you continued doing both jobs for four or five years then?

LH: For four years, yes.

MH: And then what did you do?

LH: Well, I recall Professor Michael, he was a precious person to all of us because he worked so hard to help us. He came from Alabama, lived somewhere below Tuskegee, I don't remember the name of the little town.

MH: Oh, so you worked here really all during World War I and through the end of World War I until 1920. Professor Michael, did he continue on then as the head of the Black school system or did he go somewhere else?

LH: He remained principal of the Hill Street School and part-time Jeanes supervisor of the county schools. At the end of the fourth year, Mr. Michael needed a teacher and he transferred me from Swannanoa into the city schools. I was given a fifth grade and the next year I taught grades five and three, a double session, not at the same time.

MH: And was that at Hill Street?

LH: That was Hill Street that they had double session.

MH: Now, I know that you've then later on started going summers up to Chicago to get your degree work, and I know that for many summers you worked with the other Black teachers in an English or a reading preparedness program. What's the sequence of that? What did you do after say 1921 and on?

LH: I attended summer school that the high school set up, and then I went to Tuskegee for summer school. I was given a scholarship to attend Tuskegee Institute. The scholarship was given by the Jeanes Foundation. And then I went to summer school at A&T, went to summer school at Teacher's College in Winston-Salem. I went to Voorhes College in Voorhes, South Carolina. Every summer, I was in summer school. That was a regular part of my program. I continued...at that time, we could renew our certificates and also raise our certificates by attending summer school. In the forties, I decided that I wanted to go to the University of Chicago, and in 1940 I went to Chicago.

I had a sister who was married to Attorney Pope and they lived not too far from university. And so my son and I drove up, he was just a lad, and I attended summer school there at the university. I had a difficult time getting classified because Dr. Russell, who was dean of the college, was amazed at the number of institutions I had attended. And of course, now I attended Hampton. I'm getting a little ahead of my story. I went to Hampton first, Hampton Institute in Virginia, and they classified my work in the different summer schools and gave me some credit for it and then I was required to do nine—

MH: Courses or hours?

LH: No, nine quarters. There were semesters and quarters, and I was required to do nine quarters. And so I did nine consecutive nine week sessions at Hampton Institute and met the requirement for my BS degree. I was unable to go back. I

won't say that I was really unable to go back because after the sacrificing, going back, I didn't feel it was worth my time and money to go back to march at that late date. So I took my degree in absentia and went up to the University of Chicago, and I was mentioning the difficulty I had in getting classified. Dr. Russell looked at my transcript and he found and he smiled, and I said, "What's wrong?"

He said, "Ms. Herring, you've been in every institution in the south, and some of them I've never heard of before in my life." And he said, "I can't classify you as a graduate student." I said, "Why?" I said, "I'm a graduate of Hampton Institute." He said, "You're not a total product at Hampton. I don't know the status of all of these other little schools you've been in." I said, "But I satisfied Hampton, and Hampton has been on your credit list since '32." He said, " We have standards to maintain and we cannot classify you as a graduate student." Black students had a difficult time getting classified at that time to get into the graduate school.

They had no difficulty getting into the undergraduate school, and I had been informed by the Lutheran minister's daughter, who is a graduate of that school, that I had been told that it was most difficult to get classified without a lot of deficiencies. The way they had to discourage you was to give you a lot of deficiencies, and I was determined I wasn't going to take any. So when he told me that he couldn't classify me as a graduate student, I told him I didn't feel at this point in my life that I could afford to take deficiencies. And he said, "Well, that's about all I can say," and I thanked him and told him that I wasn't too much

disturbed. I had been advised that I would have some difficulty. But I said I knew I would have no trouble at Northwestern.

MH: You gave him a little competition.

LH: I said, "I have a car, and I drove up here and I can commute to the university there." And so he shrugged his shoulders and I thanked him and marched on. They were registering students in the gymnasium and I had walked almost halfway across the gymnasium toward the door when he called me he said, "Mrs. Herring?" And I said, "Yes?" He said, "Come just a minute. I want to say something to you." And I went, he said, "I will be through in about 30 minutes." He said, "I have something I want to say to you. I have an offer I want to make you if you have time to wait." I said, "Yes, I have time to wait." And I picked up a magazine and started reading after I sat near the door, and when he had finished with the last student, he called me and he said, "You have a lovely transcript, but it's questionable. The big question is all those other institutions that you attended."

He said, "If you will let me select your courses and if you will make an average of A, I will classify you without any deficiencies." I said, "That's fair enough," and so I accepted this offer and went on over to register. I figured I had everything clear. Dr. Cotton was in charge. The state at that time paid out-of-state tuition for Black students who couldn't get the courses in the state of North Carolina, and Dr. Shepherd of North Carolina College at Durham was one of the men on the committee who determined which Black students could get this out-of-state aid.

And so I had been turned down for that because I wanted to specialize in reading, and he said, "We offer reading here at North Carolina College." I said, "You offer a course, a reading course," but I said, "I want a program in reading. I want reading methods and procedures, and I want supervisory problems in reading and I want remedial reading, developmental reading. I want a full program in reading, with an opportunity to work in and attend an instruction school."

And he was puzzled and finally said, "I'm sorry, I can't help you." But I went on and as the registration line passed up to Dr. Cotton, the person in front of me was from North Carolina and he said, "And you have out-of-state aid." She said, "Yes." And incidentally, her first name was Lucy. And he said, "The fee will be paid, the fee $100 for registry." He came to me, he said, "You are Mrs. Lucy Herring from North Carolina?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you have out of state aid?" I said, "No." He said, "Then you have to pay the full tuition." I said, "Do I have to pay all of it today?" He said, "No." He said, "Can you pay $75?" I said, "I can do so, but not conveniently." He said, "What about $50?" And I hesitated. He said, "Mrs. Herring, you'll have to pay $3 medical fee." I said, "I'll pay 10."

MH: [Phone ringing.] Let me turn this off.

LH: I don't have much peace, it seems.

MH: No, that's all right. That was what we were hearing it on here.

LH: Oh, is that what we were?

MH: Mm-hmm. Now, so you paid 10 and they registered you in some very difficult classes, didn't they? Didn't Dr. Russell sort of do that to you?

LH: Dr. Russell gave me two courses that I should have had, and there was one course on the doctoral level that I had no business with, and that was the course that was designed to trick me and to cause me to fail. That was on Friday when I registered. The following Monday when I went to class, the instructor looked at me if he thought I was something from Mars, and finally he came up and he said to me, "What are you doing in here?" I said, "I'm here for classes." He said, "You don't belong in this course." I said, "I was assigned to this course. "Why did you take it?" He said, "Why are you taking it?" I said, "I was assigned to this course." He said, "Well, why did Dr. Russell give you the course?" I said, "You would have to ask Dr. Russell that question. I'd like to know myself." And he sent me to the office with a note and Dr. Richie asked me again, why I chose the course.

I said, "This course is not my choice. Dr. Russell gave me this course as a requirement." He wasn't very happy with it, but he couldn't do a thing about it because Russell was dean of the university. I had no difficulty keeping up with the course because I had one course that was very easy, methods of elementary education, and I didn't have to concentrate very much on that. But I spent most of my time on this difficult course, which was a course administration, and many of the students were principals and superintendents. He didn't call on me one time during the nine weeks, but I knew this: If a professor has written a book and he's

teaching a course, if you study his book, regardless of what his examinations are, they're going to be geared to what he believes, what he's written about.

And I studied his book very carefully and took notes very carefully, and at the end of the nine weeks, I met Dr. Russell coming into the administration building and he was smiling, but when I looked at him, I wasn't smiling. I had been to the registrar's office, inquired about my grades, and I was told that grades were not released to individual students, that they had [inaudible 00:27:18]. I said, "Well, I'll have to know this. I'll have to know what my average is." I said, "It's a matter of life and death."

And she evidently saw my face distressed or something and she said, "Well, what is it? What are you required?" I said, "I'm required to make an average of As." She said, "Well, go home. You don't have anything to worry about." And so I think I left the office with a hop and a skip, and I met Dr. Russell and he said, "I have some good news." I said, "Yes?" "You made the average of A." I said, "I know it." He said, "I had no idea that you would ever make, uh, pass that course," and I was terribly disappointed because I didn't know at that time that he didn't give me that course as a challenge to see if I had the ability to do, but he gave it to me to prove—

MH: To trip you up.

LH: —that I couldn't make it. To convince me that I couldn't make it, and with God's help, I made it. And I made it not by the skin of my chinny, chin, chin, I really

made a good A and I had my papers to back up. And I finished the university and qualified for the National Honor Society. Students were required to get the approval of the faculty before becoming members. And so I finally received a master's degree from the University of Chicago and I did very little studying after that. I went one summer to Duke University, the National Science Foundation, I was given a fellowship. And then I went one summer to Northwestern for a curriculum course, and that was the extent of my study.

MH: How in the world did you manage? Were you able to get scholarships and grants? That must have been very difficult. I'm sure your salaries were poor, and to have to live away from home and to support yourself and your son, you must have been really pinched to do all that.

LH: Fortunately, I lived with my sister in Chicago and I didn't have to pay the regular board that I would've had to pay if I had been with someone else. But my sister had an aunt there, it was her husband's aunt, Aunt Eddie. And there were my sister and her husband and their two children, and then my son and I made six, Eddie made seven. She did the marketing and she did the cooking, and it was her suggestion that we divide the total cost of the food by the number of individuals, and that enabled me to get out without a lot of expense. And I had my own car and I drove back and forth to the university. It wasn't easy. Oh, by the way, my son worked in the dining hall. I got work for him and that helped considerably.

MH: And that was when Dr. Hutchins was head of the university, wasn't it?

LH: Yes.

MH: Was that in that period where they were being quite experimental, and Mortimer Adler and everybody. At one point there, they weren't giving grades I remember, at least in the undergraduate school. But maybe that was later on that they didn't.

LH: I don't know what it was, but they were very rigid. They gave A, B, C, and so forth.

MH: So then at this time, were you still teaching at the Hill Street School or had you become a principal? Like in the forties.

LH: At this time I moved so constantly up the ladder, I'm wondering now where I was in this matter of teaching in the forties. In '35 and '25, I was still teaching at Hill Street, and I was state supervisor. Mrs. Annie Holland came from Raleigh and observed in the Hill Street School and she entered my room. I was doing what was individualized instruction, but I didn't know it was individualized instruction. I just saw that this kid needed this and this one needed this and this one needed this, and I was just meeting their needs. I had a fifth grade, one boy at the board doing addition, another over here doing multiplication, another doing division. It was a pure mathematics, and I was just teaching where they were and she was talking about, "She's teaching individualized instruction." Well, that was the name she gave it.

At that time, I didn't know. I found out later that was really what it was, but I was just meeting the needs of the children. And so she went back to the office and was very high on praise. She said, "She's not trying to teach everybody. She's not doing lockstep type of thing, trying to teach everybody the same thing at the same time," and they both thought, both the principal and the state supervisor, thought it was wonderful. I was just doing what came naturally. And so they called me in for a conference, asked me to come at the close of the day to Mr. Michael's office, and I went in and Mr. Michael said, "Mrs. Holland once wants you to go to Harnett County as supervisor." I said, "Supervisor of what?" He said, "Supervisor of instruction, supervisor of the school." I said, "I didn't know anything about supervisory work. I'm just a teacher."

And so Mrs. Holland said, "If you can teach the teachers the things that you are teaching those children, teach them how to do that, that would be a wonderful thing for me." It took Superintendent Booker to persuade me to go. He said, "Your people need help so badly down in Harnett County," because it was a farming area and they were tenant farmers and the salaries were low. I went because he made me this promise, "You go and stay a year. If you don't like it, come back and we will give you your same job, your same grade." And so I went with the intention of staying a year, and I stayed 10 years. I went in '25. Oh yes, Mr. Michael said, "Yes, you go and when you take a notion, and you want to come back, the door will be open."

And so at the end of 10 years, I wanted to go back to Asheville, and when I wrote Mr. Michael, he didn't have a vacancy in his school and he persuaded me to accept a position in the high school. Dr. Abbott Manley was principal. Dr. Manley said he would be glad to give me a job. And so I started working in the high school. I initiated a core curriculum after studying at Chicago, and it was a very popular program at that time. And after four years, Dr. Manley was offered a position as state supervisor of high schools. And that Christmas before he was to leave to go to Raleigh, Professor Michael died, and his request to the superintendent before passing was that I succeed him as principal of the Hill Street School. Dr. Manley was quite disturbed because I was in the middle of this core curriculum program and there was nobody else prepared to carry it forward.

And so he sent for me to come to his office, Dr. Manley did, and he said, "Mr. Latham has talked with me" (Mr. Latham was the superintendent). He said, "He's concerned about the possibility of your giving up the core curriculum and going to Hill Street as principal." I said, "Why is he concerned?" He said, "Dr. Professor Michael requested just before he passed that you succeed him and what do you want to do about it?" I said, "As much as I would like to have the principalship of Hill Street School, I don't think I could afford to walk off and leave a new program. There's nobody prepared to carry it forward. And for that reason, you tell Mr. Latham that I'm deeply grateful, but I will not give up this new program after he has bought new books and new furniture and all. I can't afford to do it."

And the smile on Dr. Manley's face was just, I don't know, he was just beaming all over. And so later he told me that Mr. Latham said he would never forget the fact that I didn't run off to a principalship. And when the spring rolled around, Dr. Manley announced in the auditorium that he was leaving for Raleigh to be supervisor of state high schools. I was quite concerned, and he left and I was to go to summer school that summer, and I wasn't so sure about how I would fare under another principal because as a younger person and having done some experimenting successfully, there was naturally a feeling on the part of the older teachers, and I had—

MH: A bit of jealousy, I imagine.

LH: There's a bit of jealousy, and I could understand that. But I had a message when I came back from summer school in Chicago from Mr. Latham. My sister said that Mr. Latham said for me to come to his office as soon as I reached the city. I called the next morning and went over, and I found Dr. Manley and a new principal, Mr. Belton, and the superintendent in the office in a conference. And so I was asked to come into the office and they all were smiling up their sleeve, so to speak, and I said, "What's amusing?" They said, "Nothing amusing, we just have a surprise for you." I said, "What is it?" Mr. Latham said, "How would you like to go to Mountain Street School as principal?"

I said, "That depends on whether it's going to be a job as an independent, as a full-time principal, or as a part-time principal. Ms. Mamie, who has been principal all

these years has taught grades and been part-time principal, and Dr. Manley has been the supervising principal, and I don't want to be a figurehead. If I'm going to be a principal, I want to be a principal." And so Dr. Manley said, "So you're calling me a figurehead?" I said, "Not at all." I said, "Well, anybody who teaches third grade all day long and then keeps all the records and reports and runs the school and doesn't have the title and the pay of a full-time principal couldn't be much more than that." And so he said, "Well, would you accept the job?"

I said, "It depends on what's going to happen to Ms. Mamie." She was a part-time principal. He said, "Well, Ms. Mamie's health has failed and she's retiring." He said, "Does that make any difference?" I said, "I'm sorry about her health, but if it's a full-time job as principal, I will take it." And he said, "Are you afraid of anybody over at Mountain Street School?" They were 10 teachers, all well-experienced. And I said, "No, I'm not afraid of anyone over there." And he said, "Well, I have one teacher who's very difficult," and he said, "I can move her to another school. We don't have to have her. We didn't hire her permanently." I said, "I'd like to give her a chance. It would be a challenge to me to see whether or not I can work with her."

He says, "She's pretty mean. And I said, "Well, I would like to give her an opportunity to work with faculty." And so I accepted the job at Mountain Street and it was one of the biggest challenges of my career. That's when we met and made a list of the needs of the school. It was a terrible thing. The needs ranged

from the paving of the streets to the building of a lunchroom. It was the only school in the city that didn't have a lunchroom.

MH: How many students were at Mountain Street?

LH: We had 400 students and no lunchroom, and the lady across the street was making hot soup and the children were bringing their little cups from home, paying 5 cents a cup for tomato soup. And I went to the business manager and talked with him. He said, "Well, you're coming to me to talk about building a lunchroom and restrictions are on steel. Don't you know there are restrictions on steel?" I said, "Yes, I know there are restrictions on steel, but I know there are priorities." I said, "400 hungry children bring their little dirty cups." They couldn't have possibly been clean, and we didn't have any hot water to wash them, but it kept down hunger.

When I got through talking with him, he said, "Well, I'll talk it over by the board." He said, "You've made the picture seem more serious than I had ever realized." I said, "Some of the children come to school and the only thing they have is a bun and a bottle drink." And so we were very happy one afternoon when the business manager came over and told us that the board had approved of our plan to build a lunchroom in the basement of the school, and they built a very lovely, well-equipped lunchroom. The parents gave a shower, and the beautiful towels and curtains and cooking utensils were in adequate supply.

MH: Now what year was that, Mrs Herring, that you became a principal of Mountain Street?

LH: It was in '41. I stayed there eight years and then the state put on supervision. They hadn't had supervision for elementary school. I was still living in Chicago, and I got a letter from Mr. Byers saying that Mr. Moore, who was superintendent of the Winston-Salem City Schools, had written a letter saying that he wanted to inform him that he was asking me in a letter to accept the supervision of the Winston-Salem City Schools. And he said in view of the fact that Winston-Salem could pay more than Asheville, he felt that I would accept it and he wanted to let me know. And he said in the letter, "If I can conceive of an idea of you leaving Mountain Street, as dearly as you love it, I had turned down a job that was offered me North Carolina College at Durham. I did not want to leave Mountain Street until we achieved that goal, and we achieved it down to having the streets paved, making a survey of the community and having the parents sign up for the paving of the streets.

MH: You must have had tremendous parent cooperation.

LH: The cooperation was marvelous, and the kids joined right in with us.

MH: And so the kids then, the parents were having the kids really work at school to learn.

LH: Absolutely. My master's paper was written, the title of it was The Mountain Street School Hornets—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A.]

MH: The name of it, Hornets, H-O-R-

LH: H-O-R-N-E-T-S, Hornets. If you've ever had something to hurt you all over, you've had a hornet sting you.

MH: [Laughs; inaudible 00:00:17].

LH: And well, I arrived with that name for this reason, the ground was hard red Clay around the building. And Mr. Conner, the business manager, sent some shrubs over and had them planted around the building. And the next morning when the teachers returned to school, they found some of the shrubs pulled up by the roots and thrown in the entrance of the door. And that was before I went there. And when I went to the manager to ask him for shrubbery, he said, "Those [inaudible 00:01:13], we just called them cannibals because they did act like cannibals. I'm not spending one blank cent for a plant over at Mountain Street School." And he told me himself what the kids did. I had heard it. And I said, "Well, we're going to have some if we have to pay for them ourselves." And we set aside one day and we got each child to tell this parent to furnish a plant. We took a whole day off. We didn't teach at all that day. We got wheelbarrows and wagons, little wagons, and we were hauling black dirt from the woods up on the mountain. Now you

would've thought that was a hornet's nest situation with all those kids buzzing and digging and the wagons squeaking and the wheelbarrows bumping.

MH: You were telling me about the work day and all the kids with the plants and everything.

LH: Yes.

MH: And did it work? Did they—

LH: Yes. It worked.

MH: Did the plants grow?

LH: Could it come on?

MH: It's on.

LH: It's on? Well, we set that day aside, it was a beautiful sunshiny day, and the wheelbarrows and wagons started coming in before eight o'clock, and that hill was just buzzing. There were two tiers and we had them organized into teams, and a teacher had a charge of a team in one area. We had one team taking care of the shrubs at the base of the building, around the building. And toward the north we had a special area marked off for blossoming plants. And on the top of the top tier, they had special plants in certain areas. And marked off a place for baseball and an area for shooting marbles.

And when the state supervisor came to our school, Mrs. Marie McIver, she said, "I don't believe it." She said, when I was here first, I took my shoe heels and tapped on that solid red clay." And I said, "Nothing will grow here." But those children had brought that topsoil from the mountains, from the wooded areas of the mountains there. And those plants were growing nicely and we had very beautiful plants. And when the school building was torn down, we had a little border of white pines just as you turn the driveway, turn into the school. And some parent called me and said, "They're plowing under the white pine trees. Don't you want them? I understand you have a new lot over there you are fixing to build." And I got somebody to get the white pines. And to this day, there's a lovely border of white pines, what was in my new home on Oakland Road. And it was a beautiful thing. And I never looked at it without thinking about the hornets.

And incidentally, the lady who typed the thesis for my paper said it was one of the most fascinating stories because I wrote it, naturally, more carefully than I can just sit and talk about it. But the shrubs grew beautifully.

MH: Do you still have that thesis in your papers here somewhere?

LH: Somewhere, yes.

MH: Oh. If you come upon it before you move, don't throw it away. I'd love to read it. I'll send it to you out.

LH: I'll try my best to come across it. I have papers. I don't know. There should be a law against anybody accumulating as many papers as I have. There just should be a law against it.

MH: Well then tell me now then, since you'd achieved all your goals at Mountain Street, you didn't take the job in Winston-Salem, did you? Or did you?

LH: No, no, no. I wasn't remotely concerned, interested at all.

MH: Where did you go from Mountain Street then? To the state supervisory office—

LH: No—

MH: —to do reading classes and workshops?

LH: I went from Mountain Street to the, I had been doing part-time supervisory work in Buncombe County from the first day that I went to the high school in '35, I taught those high school classes. And then once a month I would visit the Buncombe County schools. There were only two then. They had been consolidated. And I would visit Shiloh in the morning and Black Mountain in the afternoon. And then when state supervisory work was put on, I accepted the supervision of the Asheville City and Buncombe County schools. There's one interesting thing about it. When the business manager talked with me in the office, he said, "Well, we have full-time supervisory work on now, and we don't have to worry with the county schools. We don't have to take them." And I said, "Mr. Connor, if I had to do a bootlegging job at night, I would not give up the

county teachers. We have developed a program and worked so closely, we worked as one unit and I would not give them up." He said, "Well, you'll be working and you won't get any pay for it." I said, "Well, I'm not concerned about pay for that. We are working as a team and I'd like to have it remain like that." And for 15 years, the county didn't have to pay me anything. I just adopted the few county teachers and we just blended in and worked as a unit.

MH: Now during this time, see I, being a Northerner, I know nothing about the school systems in the South. During all this time, did the Asheville and Buncombe County white schools and the Black schools, did the teachers get together for work days or for lectures for educational stuff? Did you share the same books, or was it entirely... Did you get paid the same? Was it entirely two separate systems?

LH: Well, this equalization of the salaries is a long story. I have a write-up of that on an article where I talk about the growth of the Black schools. For a long time, the salaries were not equal. But by a special struggle through the North Carolina Teachers Association who finally succeeded in getting the salaries organized. Now, at that time when we were talking about Harnett and Buncombe County, the white and Black teachers salaries had been equalized because of the fight we put up and brought about the change. We did not meet together as faculties. The white teachers had their separate meetings, and the Black teachers had theirs. Mr. Booker was superintendent of the city schools before Mr. Byers came, and that Mr. Booker would let them have the white teachers meet, we met at David Millard [school]. The white teachers would meet in the auditorium on the ground

floor, and the Black teachers were relegated to the balcony. Mr. Booker was a short man of stature, and he didn't stand on the rostrum and speak. He talked on the floor down on the 11th floor and we couldn't hear him. And Mr. Michael, well, you know how you cup your hands together and call somebody?

MH: Speak louder.

LH: Yes. Mr. Michael said, "We can't hear you up here. Speak a little louder." And of course we were smiling up our sleeves, I always took a magazine or something to read to keep from losing my mind, wasting time. But when Mr. Byers came, he attempted to bring the white and Black principals together for a meeting. And the white principals, there was one principal who objected and used his influence and they wouldn't go out to have a picture made together. They wouldn't have a picture made with the Black principals.

And Mr. Byers kept going back and forth out in the hall, with the white principals were out in the hall and we were sitting in the office. And I could see his colors changing, but he contained himself. He really walked about there and it kept his balance. And so finally he said to the Black principals, "Mrs. Lever, will you all come here in the office? And we want to have a picture made." And he had a picture made of the Black principals. He wanted a joint picture. He wanted a picture of the Black and white principals to put in the city paper for the opening of schools with these other actual city principals. And the white did not want to. This particular little principal worked like a beaver. He was just running back and

forth. And it was amusing to us. We weren't insulted, we were just amused. And so when our picture was made and Mr. Byers said, "Well, that's all. Thank you so very much." And as we left the David Millard School, the White principals were gathering on the steps to have that picture made.

Everybody was looking for the pictures of the principals in the Sunday paper and the Sunday paper came and behold, there was neither white nor Black. There was no picture at all. And that was his—

MH: Way of resolving.

LH: —excellent way of solving the problem.

MH: I heard the dinner bell, so we'll come back to this another time. This has been wonderful.

LH: Well composed, he didn't register any signs of anger at all. He just quietly said to the Black principals, "Will you sit here?" There was a long seat in the office, in the outer office, and there were not but five of us. And we sat there for a while. And then later he went out into the hall, a group was out there, and then he came back in. He said, "Well, Mr. Toliver, you and the rest of the principals come into my office." And we went in and the photographer arranged us against the wall in a special way. And he said, "Well, that's it." Said, "That ought to be a good picture." And that's all. And we were dismissed. And as we left the David Millard building, as we were going out the front, out of the front door, the white principals

were gathering, they were assembling on the steps to have their picture made. And he passed by and went on down the walkway. And I know the other principals looked forward to seeing a picture of the principals in the Sunday paper. So Mr. Byers solved that as he solved many problems. He succeeded Mr. Booker. Mr. Booker was a segregationist to his [inaudible 00:14:32].

We had meetings, teachers meetings, city-wide meetings at the David Millard school, and monthly, and the white teachers sat in the auditorium proper on the main floor, and the Black teachers sat up in the balcony. And of course, Mr. Booker was a short man and standing down on the floor instead of on the rostrum didn't enhance his voice a bit. They had poor acoustics in that auditorium. Mr. Michael was being facetious, and I'm sure most people recognized it for what it was. He would cup his hands and put it up to his mouth and said, "Speak a little louder. We can't hear you up here." And he was trying to make his voice louder and making the situation more ridiculous. I always took a magazine or something to read when we went to that meeting to keep my composure and to keep from losing my mind. I would read the whole time through because we couldn't hear. And anybody who was as prejudiced as that, I didn't want to hear him. I had no animosity. Until this day I haven't. I just have pity.

MH: Now, when Mr. Byers came, then what year was that then about?

LH: I was principal of Mountain Street School then, and I don't know, I don't recall the exact—

MH: Was it before World War II or after?

LH: That makes it more difficult.

MH: Well, I was trying to just put it into a timeframe.

LH: If I could look at my memoirs, I have that what year Mr. Byers came following Mr.—

MH: Well, I have your book so I can look it up.

LH: Yes. But shortly after that, we moved to the City Hall and for the first time in the history of Asheville, Black principals and white principals sat in the same room at the same table listening to the superintendent. They automatically filed in and seated themselves in groups. The white principals came in first and took the left-hand side of the table. They had the long table, the length of the boardroom. And the Black principals just passed right on by and went to the opposite side. And so the groups were facing each other. And that lasted for a short period, maybe about nine months or something like that. Once in a while before the superintendent came in or during a break, one principal would come over to the other group to talk with the other. And eventually unaware of it, we just became mixed in our seating. So we had a chance to do a better job because we planned to cooperatively, white and Black. We had much to learn and they had just as much to learn as we did by working together on our problems.

MH: I know nothing about education. Was there much of a problem in Asheville then? If we're, say, the sixth grade students at an all-white school learning the same curriculum as sixth grade students at one of the Black schools? Or because of lack of supplies or things, were you, basically, were the kids a little bit behind?

LH: There are several factors that caused the Black kids to be behind. In addition to the, although Asheville did a better job when it came to supplying the instructional materials for all schools, there were some differences. And one of my major problems in the Black schools, due to the fact that the economic level, that was a factor there, we found that at Ira B. Jones [Elementary School], which is a high economic level, but when we gave the standardized tests, they always stood head and shoulders above all the others, white and Black. And at the school out at West Asheville, not Aycock [Elementary School], but it's, I don't know the school, but the name of the school doesn't come to me.

MH: Vance [Elementary School]?

[Now Lucy S. Herring Elementary School; renamed in 2021.]

LH: Vance was a fairly good school. Mr. Hayden left [inaudible 00:20:31] Carson went there. They were in a low economic class, the parents were. They didn't have the interest in the schools of the other. They didn't follow through. And in fact, the Burton Street School was out there also. It was a five teacher school. But Mr. Byers offered to close the Burton Street School because it was small, and let the children go to this white school. The Black parents objected because that

program, they felt was better than this white school. And the scores on the tests indicated that. And so they refused to go. They objected and told them, they didn't feel that they had anything to gain by going to school. To show you how they appreciate or failed to appreciate their school, somebody in the community, some of the teenagers took the plaque out of the, down from the school, that was metal. And the children had disciplinary problems.

MH: After you left the Mountain Street School, you went as Superintendent of Instruction?

LH: Supervisor.

MH: Supervisor of Instruction. Now, was that of all instruction or was that of the English and the reading programs?

LH: The elementary school, that job was the supervisor of all instruction in the elementary school.

MH: And what year did you do that?

LH: I don't recall that year. It was the year that the state put on supervision for the first time. I was in Chicago that summer when Mr. Byers offered me the position.

MH: So was that there was then a supervisor of instruction for the white schools and a supervisor of instruction for the Black schools?

LH: Yes. Mr. Byers announced in a principal's meeting that fall that the state had put supervision on the program and there would be supervisors whose salaries would be paid by the state for the first time. And he said, "We have two supervisors. One is Mrs. Herring, who will have the supervision of the Black schools. And the other one is," and he gave her name and I don't recall it now, she came from Greensboro College there in Greensboro. The teacher training program. And so Mr. Byers said, "I have told these ladies that they ought to supervise the work and the schools, but they are to go only to the schools to which they are invited. If they are not invited to a school, she has no obligation to go to that school." And before the meeting was over near the end, Mrs. Rita Lee, who was the principal of the Hill Street School, asked Mr. Byers. She had talked with the Black principals to allow the Black principals to remain for a brief meeting in the boardroom after they dismissed. And so they wanted me to know that they didn't consider this an invitational job. They felt that I had something to offer and the state would pay for it and they would accept it gladly. And I had the full support of every Black principal.

Supervisory work was not very popular at that time. Some of the supervisors throughout the state, especially in the eastern part of the state, felt that they had the authority to do things in the school, to take over certain things that run the school. And I had them to understand that I wasn't interested in running a school. If I had been, I wouldn't have accepted this position. My main purpose would be to work with them for the improvement of the instruction of all the children.

MH: Now, after you were appointed the supervisor, then your office moved to the City Hall office?

LH: No, at that time the schools were at David Millard, and they didn't have accommodations for the supervisors so far as the office's up and running. Mr. Conner's office was there. He was a business manager. And Mr. Graham was Supervisor of Physical Education. And there was a family life coordinator who had her office there. There were three people in that one office at that time. And after the supervisors program was begun, Ms. Creason was put in the fourth corner in that room, in that office. So there were four people in that office. And Mr. Byers wanted me to accept a vacant room that was at the Mountain Street School. At that time, a young man from the high school succeeded me as a principal. He had had no experience as a principal.

And I told Mr. Connor, our business manager who talked with me about going to Mountain Street School, I said, "I would be very unhappy if I have to go to the Mountain Street School and have an office there." And he said, "Why would you be unhappy?" I said, "Because it wouldn't be fair for the principal. Those teachers are well-experienced. And this young man has not had one day of experience as a supervisor. And if when problems came up, the thing that they would do would take a time to come to my office to talk about it. He wouldn't be comfortable and I wouldn't be comfortable because I know he would be anxious. And so I think it would be at disservice to him to put me in the same building with him and his faculty. I think he should be left alone to develop a program which he would like

to develop to get off on his own." And so he said, "Well, where could you go?" I said, "There are places, I can find a place." And I found a place.

Somebody had said that the YMI Cultural Center, they had a drug store downstairs. Mr. Fenton Harris was in charge. And they had offices upstairs. And so many people had tried to rent that space upstairs for different purposes. Mr. Harris was a very odd person, but a very dedicated person, and a difficult person to work with. And he refused them flatly. And his wife said to me one day, "Ms. Herring, that large room upstairs would make a good office. Mr. Harris told me that if you wanted it, he would be delighted and honored to have you in the building. But he wasn't picking up every Tom, Dick and Harry because he was able to pay." I said, "Well, I consider that a compliment. And I'll call him and make an appointment with him." I called him, made an appointment. He said, "Yes, I'll be glad to let you have that office up there." And I got his figures and gave them to the business manager. He was delighted.

I said, "But it will have to be painted inside and that has to be a floor covering." So he said, "Well, we don't have any money to do a lot of decorating." I said, "Well, it would have to be livable." So we got a linoleum, a very colorful linoleum rug, instead of having the rough floor. And the trade teacher, Mr. Harry Vincent and his boys built a lovely display case, bookcase and magazine rack, all combined, was beautiful. And Mr. Connor bought Venetian blinds for the windows and it made a very attractive office.

And so Ms. Huffman was the name of the white woman who was made supervisor of the white school. One of the principals, a woman, did not invite Ms. Huffman to her school ever. And at the close of the year, she went back to Greensboro. She said she did not want to be where she wasn't fully accepted by the whole group of the principals. And then Ms. Jenny Creason, a native of Asheville, who was well known by all of the Asheville people, was elected supervisor of the white schools. And we worked together for years. One day she came over to see the office that I had and she said, "Well, I just don't see why you have such a nice place. And I'm over there at David Millard in a little corner." And I said, "Well, darling, there are reasons for that." She said, "What reason can you give?" I said, "Segregation." I said, "If that room had five corners, I would be in the fifth corner. But I happened to be," I didn't say Black. It wasn't nice to say Black then like it is now. I said, "If I were not a Negro, I would have that fifth corner." And she got the message clear. She made no other complaints about it.

So I stayed there for a number of years until Mr. Byers was able to get the seventh floor of the City Hall. And he set up an office. His office was first as you go in, the business manager's office was next. And that left two offices on the east end on either side of the building. I was given the office on the left next to Mr. Connor, the business manager's office, between the white super, and she was given the opposite corner of the building. There was between us, a wide area, a big room, and we decided the other supervisor and I, that we would set up a material center. And we did. And I had suggested to Ms. Creason that we

categorize the things by subject areas in displaying the children's work, put all social studies together and all art together and all literature together, regardless of race. And she said, "No, will you take this side and I'll take this side." I said, "If that's your choice, it's entirely satisfactory with me."

My teachers were especially good in manuscript writing. I had concentrated on that because it was so essential to successful teaching and reading, and a practical thing to do and easy for the primary children. They could make the transition from manuscript to cursive writing without any great difficulty. And when the first display was put up, Mr. Byers came into the material center as we called it, and he admired the work of my teachers. He said that the manuscript writing is beautiful. You don't find much of that kind of work, of that quality of work. The teachers have not concentrated on manuscript writing. And he said, "I'd like you to take charge of the bulletin board in the boardroom." And I said, "Well, I'll be happy to do that." Then after that, Mrs. Creason said, "I don't see any reason why we can't put our work up together." I said, "Well, it was your suggestion that we have it put up—"

MH: Separate.

LH: "—separate. I hadn't dreamed of anything like that, but I'm perfectly happy." And so he didn't say any more then. So she came to me later. She said, "When are we going to put our work up?" I said, "I'm just waiting for you to set the time. Had to discuss the time, didn't we?" And we decided we wanted it up a certain part of it

up before the opening of the school so that the teachers came in, they could look at the materials and have suggestions. And it was much more effective and there was greater balance. And it was certainly professionally more desirable. And the teachers, especially white teachers, seemed happy. Because they wanted, it was the work displayed by the Asheville city teachers, not just one group on this side and the white group on the other side.

MH: Now, where did you go from being the supervisor of instruction? What was your next responsibility?

LH: My next responsibility did not take me away from the Asheville City School. But I might say this, from the very first year that I returned, I had gone to Harnett County at the request of the State Department to do supervisor work. And I was there for 10 years. But that's the only work that took me away from the city. At this time, was in the '40s, I think '48, I started to do work as a reading consultant. There was a request from the superintendents for help. They had seen our work in the summer school, had seen the teacher's work. I initiated a reading clinic at North Carolina College at Durham. And in '45, it was the only program of its kind in the south. Nobody else, the consultants, Dr. Betts, and the other people who came from the universities said that they had done work throughout the south and they didn't know of a place, a college where a reading clinic was in operation.

Dr. Thomas Reynolds of Asheville, whom I worked with in the county, had gone to Duke University to head the science program. And he gave me a stipend and

asked me to name a high school teacher. And I named Mrs. Hussie Burton. And at the close of the, it was a science workshop at Duke that he had. And after at the end of a session, the reading clinic had open house, which they displayed different kinds of instructional materials, new ideas and suggestions, charts and flashcards and many different techniques and materials for teaching and reading. And so Dr. Reynolds asked the science if they would like to attend the open house. And they were very eager. They got the cars lined up and we went over to see the display. And one of the white teachers said to me, "I wish we'd had a program like this." I said, "You are welcome to attend this program." I said, "Only I think the state of North Carolina might not approve of it." So they were quite pleased with the program. And the following, the science workshop at Duke, which we were enrolled in, closed. And it was quite successful.

Dr. Petty was a math instructor. Dr. Reynolds was the science instructor. And I bring in this matter of relations because I've always been deeply aware of the need for human relations or race relationship, whatever you want to call it. And Dr. Petty was not married. And we had quite a number of, and this workshop was for supervisors. White and Black supervisors were in the same class. I was the only Black supervisor in the group of white supervisors. And one of the officials came by to visit the workshop one day. And he came to me and he said, "How did you happen to get into the workshop?" I said, "I was given a stipend by Dr. Reynolds who heads the National Science Foundation program here." He said, "Well, how

do you feel with these other people?" I said, "Well, to me, they're just other people." I said, "Doesn't make any difference to me."

I said, "Pigmentation has nothing to do with the quality work that one does." I said, "I feel perfectly comfortable and I feel perfectly capable of doing the same quality work that they are doing. And I think if you talk to Dr. Reynolds, his records will show that my work is of a very high quality." Dr. Petty had a party at his home and he invited the workshop people out, the supervisors. And the day after he made the announcement that the group was invited to his home for a cookout, he left his office and I saw him close across the campus. And then in a few moments, I saw him rushing back and I said, "Wonder why Dr. Petty is coming back." And he came to the door. We were in there as the classes had been dismissed, and we were doing work for the next day.

And he came to the door and beckoned to me to come to the door. And I went, he said, "Mrs. Herring, when I said all of you are invited, and if for any reason anybody doesn't make it or can't make it, I will understand." I said, "What are you trying to say Dr. Petty?" He said, "Well, I didn't mean to imply that everybody, that I didn't expect everybody to come." I said, "I couldn't read your expectations, but I know you are intelligent enough to say what you mean. I think you are, I'm sure you are. And when you said the class is invited, I'm certainly a member of the class, on your record." I said, "Your records show that I'm in your class, and if there's anything with wheels on it that will take me out there, I will be there." He said, "Well, thank you so much. I didn't..." I said, "Listen, I'm not sensitive about

things like that." I said, "I don't have any feeling of inferiority. That's not one of my problems." And so I went.

And when he wanted us to come into his home to give us a short tour of his home, I found that he had a Black middle-aged woman there who was almost like family to him, almost like a mother to him. And I never rushed ahead. As a group, went through and admired the place. I just observed leisurely. And I saw this Black woman, she was a pretty brown, and she had on a white uniform. And I passed the room and she beckoned to me and I went and she said, "You Ms. Herring, aren't you?" I said, "Yes." "Dr. Petty talks about you a whole lot. And he tells me that you really out there hoeing your row." I said, "Honey, that's what I'm out there for, to hoe my row. That's my only purpose for being out there is to hoe my row." So she said, "I want you to know I'm proud of you, honey. Thank you very much."

MH: How nice.

LH: So Dr. Petty talked about this person, how she had taken the place of a mother and relative how she loved and worked with him and for him. That mutual love and respect that they had for each other. He said he didn't know what in the world he would do without her. He had no mother, no father, and he hadn't been able to find anybody to marry him. And there were plenty other people up in years who would've been so happy.

MH: AAUW, was that during the '40s or was that in the '50s—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B.]

MH: When did you join AAUW? [American Association of University Women]

LH: It was in the ‘40s. They were having their meetings at the George Vanderbilt Hotel then. It wasn't the Vanderbilt Apartment at that time. I can't give you the exact date, but I do know it was in the ‘40s.

MH: And were you able to be active with that right away, or were you just so bogged down with all your school responsibilities or—?

LH: I wasn't bogged down to the extent that my attendance was affected; they were having meetings in the homes as they do now, different organizations. They were having a meeting in the Lord Auditorium at the Pack Library when Ms. Nanine Iddings said to me, "Mrs. Herring, why don't you join our club, our meeting, our group?" I said, "I will be delighted to." And that was the first time I became actively involved in a group. I had just been attending the general meetings. I had not attended any of the specific meetings.

MH: Now, in the ‘50s and the ‘60s in the Asheville schools, when did the desegregation start making a difference within the school district and within the educational system? Or was that later into the ‘70s? See, since I didn't live in Asheville in that period, I just don't know.

LH: Well, the first segregation, you know, our governor got on television and asked us to accept voluntary segregation, which was an insult to whatever intelligence we

had. And there was a flat refusal. I think North Carolina and Mississippi's superintendents were the only two that we had any knowledge of that asked the Black Teachers Associations to accept voluntary segregation.

MH: I didn't know that.

LH: You didn't?

MH: No.

LH: I was with the planning group with the North Carolina Teachers Association, our Black organization, Governor Hodges sent a letter to Mr. Green, our president of the association then, and asked us to accept voluntary segregation. Mr. Green sent him a very, I don't know how to describe it, but he said that, "We will not accept for one second any plan that will discriminate against our people." And he got a flat refusal there. So they talked about closing the public schools, as you've probably heard, you didn't know.

Then they came up with this freedom of choice plan where the schools were supposedly open and any white child could go to any schools he wanted to, and any Black child could go to any school he wanted to. The program was just an opportunity. It was a one-way road, which a few Black children traveled into white schools, but no white children came into Black schools and it wasn't at all satisfactory.

The Newton School enrolled the first Black child. I think there were three, and that was a very successful program. He was a wonderful principal, and I worked with the teachers with the testing and so forth. But that program soon ended because there were several lawsuits. The county was sued and the city was sued, and eventually like a thunderbolt there were orders giving the Asheville city—it was before Christmas—I think they had one month to desegregate the whole system.

MH: Wow.

LH: And the shuffling of chairs, as Ms. Coward, one of the editors of the paper, describes it. It was a hustle and a bustle and a scramble trying to get the schools desegregated.

MH: Now, who was superintendent of schools at that time?

LH: I'm trying to think. Mr. Byers wasn't there. Mr. Byers said -- I'm coming to your answer, but let me say, make this observation: When Mr. Byers met with the principal, he said, "You know about the decision that has been handed down regarding desegregation of the school?" When one principal asked, "Well, what did we intend to do about it?" He said, "As far as I am concerned as superintendent, we are going to abide by the law."

Well, that didn't strike some of the people too favorably. Of course, it did the Black principals, but Mr. Byers later accepted the presidency of the Asheville

Federal Bank. He had had several offers. One of the places was to Florida, but, there was Hursey's Jewelry Store on Haywood, and one of the men in there, quite an outstanding citizen, said, "Well, we have given your superintendent an opportunity to resign." And to that, I didn't comment. I didn't answer him. I just acted as if I didn't hear.

Mr. Byers did resign and Mr. Funderburk came. I was told by a reliable educator in the system that he was sent as a person to block desegregation, but he didn't succeed as a superintendent. There were conflicts between the superintendent and the white principals. Several of them had difficulty, and Mr. Griffin is a person who was in charge.

There was some dissatisfaction. They followed the prevailing procedure at that time throughout the South, the Black schools were automatically closed. Mountain Street was closed. It wasn't Mountain Street then. It was a new school. It was the Herring School. Brand new school, the newest school in the system, and it was closed. Livingston Street School was closed, so was Burton Street.

Hill Street was not closed. They used that for a junior high school instead of an elementary school. The plans and planning for the segregated schools, the children in East End at the Herring School, which was formerly Mountain Street School, were bussed to Ira Jones School.

MH: Oh my heavens.

LH: And of course, being in a very high economic community, they were not too happy. And they did not want the white children to come to Mountain Street School or Herring School because of the slum area bordering that community. They bussed the children from Livingston Street School to West Asheville, which was a definite hardship on the Black parents.

The primary children had to get up early and ride across the river to Aycock. And there was quite a bit of dissatisfaction with the children on the buses. It was so unfair to transport the little ones, first-graders, and the parents objected. I never forget Mrs. Cole. Mrs. Cole had an article in the paper saying that she was speaking for herself and not for the other white parents, but she urged them to think sensibly about the situation and to go on and get the instructional program started. And she was about the most active, the most vocal parent in the white group.

MH: Now, which Mrs. Cole was that? Is that Kathleen Cole?

LH: She was called by her husband's name.

MH: Is that the Mrs. Cole who's Gail Godwin's mother?

LH: I don't know Gail Godwin.

MH: The writer.

LH: No, I don't know about that.

MH: Mrs. Frank Cole, I think, was...

LH: No, it wasn't Frank Cole. It was another Cole. I don't think it was a King Cole. [Laughs.] I don't know. But at any rate, she put up a good fight for the program and spent some time doing supply work, sub work in the school.

MH: Now, what were you then doing professionally in the 60s and 70s? Now, I can't even remember, when did you retire from the school system?

LH: I retired in ‘64. Dr. Duncan, who was president of Livingston College, came to Asheville to talk with me about accepting a position there. The Doris Duke Foundation had appropriated $40,000 to begin a reading program for college freshman students. And he said he couldn't find anybody in the state who qualified except me.

I told him, I said to him, "I am 64 and I'll be 65 next year and eligible for retirement." He said, "Well, that's a good reason you should leave now." Said, "If you leave now and go to Livingston College, you can stay there as long as you want to, as long as you're not dragging a leg. But if you stay here, you'll be kicked out next year because of your age."

He brought his wife with him and the two of them won the battle. They won out. I put up a pretty stiff fight, but I lost, and I'm so glad that I left when I did. It's nice to be where you're wanted instead of waiting until you were kicked out because of situations.

MH: So then you went to Livingston College.

LH: I went to Livingston College and I initiated that Doris Duke Foundation, Dr. Emmett Betts, founder of Temple University, and Mr. Sawyer, a member of a staff at Western Carolina University, were consultants to that program. In critiquing the program, Dr. Betts said it was the beginning of one of the best reading programs in the country.

People came from other colleges to observe our children in operation there. We started with just the college freshman students, the students of college potential of those who made the highest scores, and then I insisted that they next year include all college freshman students. The program extended to the next year to include all freshman students, and the staff was increased and we had quite a successful program.

Dr. Duncan, our president, was very capable of making contacts and collecting contributions. He was able to get the Noyes Foundation to make a donation for a summer program for high school students of college potential.

And that program was quite successful. It was 1968. I'd been there four years. My son was, had volunteered for the Vietnam War, and I agreed to go to Phoenix to stay with his wife and my two grandsons. But Dr. Duncan came to my office before I left at the end of the summer, the summer school, the Noyes Foundation program for the high school students was in progress.

I had asked to be excused to leave in August, and he came by to tell me that he wanted me to stay on until the end of the summer, the end of the program, to receive the parents who had cooperated so beautifully. These students were those who were not financially able to pay the tuition fee, were given scholarships from the Noyes contribution. I told him that I felt that he should be there to receive the parents.

He said, "Ms. Herring, I will not be here." Dr. Duncan traveled quite a bit, and he was almost always in and out, and I thought he meant that he would be taken to some part of the country to lecture and to collect money for the college. And we talked on. He said, "That's the greatest favor you can do for me if you'll just be here." His wife, he agreed for her to take the program and draw it to its conclusion at the end of that summer.

And I tried very hard to get him to release me. Finally, he said, "I don't have much of a choice." He said, "You have worked so hard, I'll have to let you go. What I would like for you to consider the program another year." He looked very sad and downhearted when he walked away from the office. I didn't like it the way he looked, and I didn't like the way he talked.

And after he left, I wondered what he meant when he said, "I will not be here." And I said, "Oh, well, I'm just being sentimental." I said, "He just meant what he said, he just won't be here." I had been in Phoenix two weeks when I received a

telegram from my secretary saying -- not a telegram, a telephone call. I'm sorry. She was in tears.

And she said, "Oh, Ms. Herring, our president is dead." He always said he wanted to die with his shoes on. And he did precisely that. I did go back. I did not go back for the funeral. I didn't want to be a part of it, but I went back afterwards and did close the summer program, and those kids wept. Oh my goodness, just so sad that we lost one of our greatest leaders when Dr. Duncan passed.

MH: Now after staying then a year in Phoenix, then did you come back to Asheville at that time?

LH: I came back to Asheville, yes. And two weeks after I had to return, I was tripping... I don't know what it was, but I was sent to the hospital. I couldn't talk. I couldn't raise my head. I couldn't raise my hands, but I didn't have a stroke.

MH: Well, it wasn't that Guillain-Barre, huh?

LH: I don't know what that is.

MH: Oh, that's a neurological disease that comes on real fast.

LH: Well, thank God it wasn't that. I was in the hospital two months, and I was quite happy. I didn't have any pain. And Dr. Holtz said to me one day, "Don't you want to go home?" I said no, and I didn't. I was perfectly happy. I'd never seen so many flowers before and never had so many visitors.

When I was dismissed to go home, I had a practical nurse to come and take care of me. And one afternoon I was walking just outside my gate, and Dr. Holtz, who was my family doctor, drove past. He lived just below me, and he stopped his car. He said, "You are doing mighty fine young lady." I said, "Thank you."

He said, "I can tell you now, but I couldn't tell you some time ago. You were the sickest person I've ever seen who didn't die." I said, "Well, thank God I didn't." This day, they don't know what was wrong. I was without any pain whatsoever, and I was perfectly happy.

MH: Well, I recall, now, did you have your sister living with you at this time or was that later on?

LH: It was later when my niece died and my sister, Mrs. Candler, was not very well. She lived across the street from me, and after the death of her daughter, my niece, Viola Candler, she came to live with me. She was not able to stay in the house alone.

In fact, Viola, who had a premonition of her death, said to my sister, "After I'm gone, you go and live with Aunt Lucy. That doesn't make any sense for two elderly women to be in these big houses alone." And that premonition came around just as she dreamed. And so we stayed in my new home. It was just about 10 years old. I had built it and called it my retirement home.

I had all plans for my retirement there, wrought iron guards and railings, every door, low bath, glass-enclosed carport, the sitting area. And I was just at the point where I felt that I was going to have a long, happy retirement.

MH: Now, where was your house?

LH: It was at 64 Oakland Road.

MH: I know that one.

LH: Just off Victoria Avenue. You turn off just before you get through the Asheville Technical.

MH: I know where Harriet's house is on Oakland Road.

LH: Well, my house is on the corner of Oakland and Erskine Avenue, just before you get to the Hafe house.

MH: And then what? Did your sister become paralyzed or bedridden or something?

LH: No, she was very feeble, and the project was different from what it is now and what it was later. The cars would speed by two or three o'clock in the morning just turning their cars, the car [inaudible 00:27:17]. And I said, "This is no place for two old souls." I said to my sister, "We need to be where we can have protection."

And I had commercial service for my two lawns. I had one on the front and one on the back, and they were not reasonable in their charges. One of the workers told me when I was in Phoenix, I had that service continued when I was in Phoenix. He didn't tell me that until he had fallen out with his boss. He said, "I hate to tell you, but there were times when my boss charged you for service, and we never did that service." I didn't let that concern me because that had passed and the lawn was still in fairly good condition.

But I wanted to find a place where my sister and I could be comfortable and protected, and I called Doctor.... Oh, I went to the Biltmore Garden Apartments. I thought we would like that, but every time I went there, the office was closed. One morning it was closed. I drove out one at noon, it was closed.

I drove out one afternoon it was closed, and I said to my sister, Nettie, "Stand right here close to me." I said, "Now, look around," I said, "the pool is beautiful." The apartments on tiers one right above the other. And each room had a balcony, and there was a beautiful crimson petunias on each balcony. It was a positively beautiful thing. It reminded me more of Switzerland than any country I ever visited.

I said, "All of this is beautiful. This is August and everything is green and beautiful." But I said, "But when the sleet and the snow start falling, who's going to come out here in these woods looking for us?" And she said, "I hadn't thought about that." She said, "I guess I'm like the grasshopper who hops around all

summer, has a good time, and then when the winter comes and he starts freezing, it's too late to do anything about it.

So I gave up that, and I called the county and asked to speak to Dr. Richardson, who was the county physician. And when he came to the telephone... He and I had worked together in the county. I was part-time supervisor, and he was county physician, and we had worked in the county together.

He said to me, "Have you retired? I said, "Yes, I have just come back from Phoenix." He said, "Well, are you still interested in doing any kind of work?" I said, "Not particularly. I think as long and as hard as I have worked this time now, let me just rest." And I said, "I'm trying to find a place where I can take my sister and we can live together and be protected."

And he said, "Well, why don't you come to the Vanderbilt?" Well, see, he was head of the foundation. So I said, "What do you think I'm calling you for?" He said, well, "You go to the Vanderbilt and fill out a blank and write my name across the top of it, where it says recommendations." And I did. And the manager, Mr. Morris, didn't know me. And so I asked for the blank and took it and filled it out, wrote Dr. Richardson's name across the top where it said references.

And he looked at me. He said, "Are you that Lucy Herring?" I said, "I don't know what you mean by that Lucy Herring. I am Lucy Herring, but I don't know about that Lucy Herring." He said, "Well, this is a blank of a request you have here." I

said, "Well, it's not an unreasonable request. I wanted an efficiency apartment for my sister adjoining a bedroom apartment by myself."

He said, "I've never filled an order like this." And I said, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" He said, "What in the blank do you think I'm going to do about it? The man has spoken." I said, "Well." He said, "I can give you a bedroom apartment now, and there's an efficiency upstairs that I can give your sister." I said, "Well, my sister can't stay upstairs." I said, "She's not able to be alone. We going to have to be close together."

He said, "Well, let me show you the bedroom apartment, and then we see what we can do about the other." And in about a week, he called me back and one lady had moved, and so he gave me an efficiency for her and a bedroom apartment myself. But I used them. I changed our plan of sleeping. I had the living room was a joint set up, and the bedroom was a master bedroom.

So I had twin beds and my sister and I slept in that room eventually, but before that time, to start with, she was in the adjoining efficiency. And the thing that caused Mr. Morris to hit the ceiling was a day I went to him and asked him if he would give me permission to have a door cut between the two apartments so that I could go back and forth and look after my sister through the night.

He told me he didn't think that there was any carpenter available, not one that would be acceptable to him. I said, "Well, I know one who would be acceptable to you." I said, "He built the whole project on Hafe Drive," and I said, "one of the

houses is a two-story, brick house, and I'm sure he could knock a wall out and put a door in." And he said, "Well, see what you can get him to do." Mr. Hafe consented.

He said, "I'll do it on this condition that if you ever reach a place that you don't need it, you'd have to have it put back in satisfactory condition." I said, "That would be easily done. I get the same person to do it." And so we had that set up, so we used that efficiency for a living room and the regular living room for a den. Then we had the bedroom, and my sister and I were very, very happy for over three years.

MH: When did your sister die?

LH: We went there in ‘71, and she died three years later. She had cancer of her throat, but she never suffered. Dr. Littlejohn said he didn't believe in letting cancer patients suffer. She had a tiny white tablet, and I kept her supplied with Kleenex. And when she put that Kleenex in her mouth and she saw bright red blood, she said, "Give me a pill." Because her throat was hemorrhaging. And immediately that stopped it. And so she was sick about a year, but she wasn't in the hospital for three days.

MH: Now, we only have about 15 minutes before you have to be at lunch.

LH: Are you kidding?

MH: It's 12:15. So let me just now, we're pretty well up to date, but why don't you just, and you have so many of them, it's hard to do, but why don't you just list for me some of the honors that you have received and some of the activities. Now, I know that you were a member of the Southern Highlanders and that you helped get together the Black Highlanders exhibit for—

LH: I initiated and coordinated the Black Highlanders Research Center Project. I had nine retired teachers to work with me, and after we got organized, we had the whole part of support of the community. People brought artifacts from New York, Philadelphia, far and near.

Isaac Dickson, this former slave who helped to organize the Asheville city schools, had a granddaughter in New York City, and she brought her grandfather's artifacts on a bus from New York City, and there were other artifacts sent from the Northern area, people who have been keeping them, hoping that eventually there would be somewhere that they could be stored. So as a result of that project, today, that Black Highlanders collection is the major source from which Black people can find information about their heritage.

Before, there just wasn't any place that you could go and find out anything unless you went to the library and found some clippings or to the newspaper library and found some clippings.

MH: Now, you were the Asheville Buncombe Woman of the Year. I know that you've received honors from many of the Black organizations in town. I remember

seeing some plaques, and you've received educational honors. Would you like to give a brief listing for...

LH: Well, the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority named me the Woman of the Year. That's not an educational as such. And I was given a plaque by the principals of North Carolina who attended a workshop at North Carolina College in Durham, and I received one from Livingstone College and one from the Masons and one from the Inter-Denominational Ministerial Alliance. And there are several others that I-

MH: Oh, and you have the Thomas Wolfe Award too, don't you, for your book?

LH: Yeah, for my memoirs, I received the Thomas Wolfe Literary Award, which was quite a surprise to me. I hadn't anticipated.

MH: And now, what year was it that you published your memoirs? Was that about ‘82 or ‘83?

LH: ‘83.

MH: Had you done a previous book of poetry?

LH: I had been working on a book of poems, but I hadn't made any effort to have them published. But since that time, I have a new collection, and I was trying to complete the second book, which I gave a title of "Messages in Miniature," and with emphasis on race relations.

I've always been interested in race relations. I started with the Human Relations Council when I first came to Asheville in my teens, and it was race relations then. Now, they've made some improvement, it's human relations.

MH: Well, I thank you so much. I know that this is just a tremendous amount of time. Have you seen that women have made as much progress as could be in their lives and in their job security and in a little bit more freedom of choice or independence as far as marriages and divorces go these days?

LH: I think there has been some improvement, but there's a long way to go. And there's so much discrimination that is so deep-rooted that it has not moved as rapidly as it should have.

MH: Now, discrimination primarily for women or primarily for Blacks, or primarily for Black women?

LH: Discrimination for Blacks, period. And then there's discrimination against women, all women. If you are a woman, you are likely to run into much more difficulty than you would if you were a man.

MH: You must have become a pass master at getting around things in order to get your things achieved, being a woman and being Black. And in the period that you worked and managed to keep going and progressing, you must have really developed great skills.

LH: Great endurance, I think I would say. I have endured quite a bit. I had difficulty when I took my book. I was a curriculum consultant for the David C. Cook Publishing Company for their religious readers. The first one was for grades one through three, and the second one was for grades four through six.

And the editor of the David C. Cook Company took my book to examine it, to evaluate it. And she said to me, "What caused you to want to write a book? There's no money in writing books." I said, "Money didn't occur to me, Ms. Toma. I just had a message and I wanted to share it."

And she said, "Well, I'm an editor and I can't write a book. You are an educator and a darn good one, but you can't write a book. You'll have to take an assistant. You'll have to take an experienced writer to write the book jointly." And I said, "No, I won't have to." I said, "I would be ashamed for my grandchildren to think that I couldn't write my own little Black story."

And she said, "Well, do you realize that we are one of the oldest publishers of publishing companies in America?" I said, "I realize that David C. Cook is a well-established publishing company, but that's no reason why I should accept a co-author to say what I have to say." And she said, "Well, that means because we are well-established that we can give you more than anybody else." I said, "Well, I didn't write the book to try to get money, I wrote it to try to get a message over. I had a message that I wanted to share."

She said, "Well, we can't take it unless you accept a co-author." I said, "Well, I'm very sorry I wasted your time." I said, "I am grateful to you." And I got my hat and went downstairs to the materials of Mr. Davis, who was my boss. He had hired me to work and be one of the curriculum consultants. There was one from Chicago, Black, one from Oral Roberts University, and one from Wisconsin, white. There were four of us.

So I turned down that offer, and I called my son. I said, "I could have had my book published by the David C. Cook Publishing Company but I refused to accept a co-author." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because I didn't need one." I said, "You let a co-author come in and he doesn't know anything about you and about your life."

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A.]

LH: I said, "I am going to write and have my only black story published." He said, "And Momma, you'll get pub option money out of your little black pocketbook." I said, "Well, if I have to, I would just have to." And I did have to pay $7,000 to have it published, but I don't regret it the least. I wanted to touch people positively, and one of the greatest rewards has been that the letters that I've received from people all over the country.

MH: And you've gotten some of it back, too.

LH: I did get some of it back, but my greatest pleasure came from the letters.

MH: That's great. Well, I just thank you so very much and wish you luck on your next adventure off to Tucson.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]